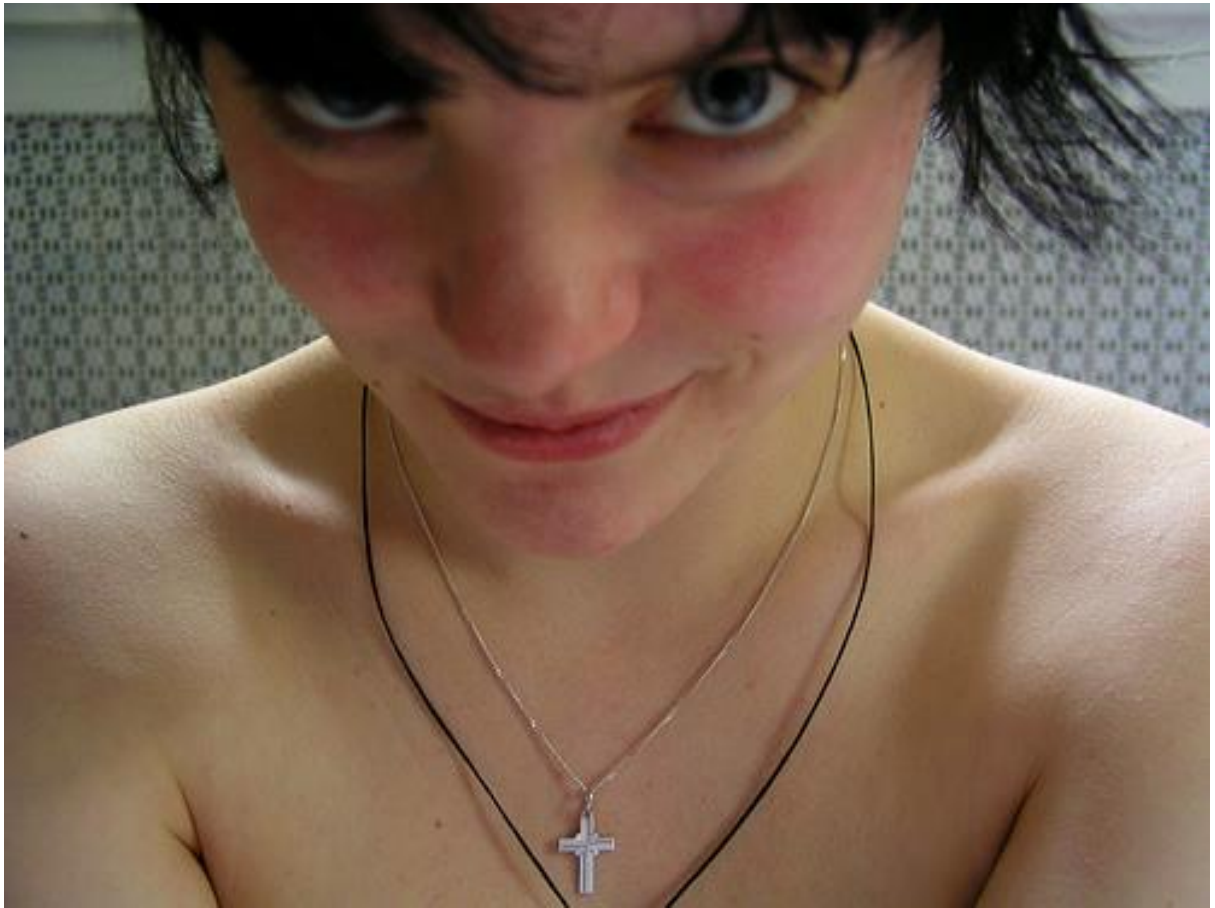


# **HAND IN GLOVE PT. 2: PHOTOGRAPHS/ESSAYS**



## PREFACE

It's Easter Sunday, 2013. I'm sitting in a Starbucks in Conshohocken, Pa, thinking about Jeremy Eric Tenenbaum and this pdf I've assembled. The first pdf in the projected series "Hand in Glove" was issued little over a week ago, and the response has been terrific. I would go so far as to say that "Hand in Glove" has touched a nerve. The magnetic appeal PFS has right now is based on a fundamental difference between us and other American artists— a difference which covers both class and aesthetics. None of us were set in place by our families, and our work is all legitimately created. The fraudulence of America has always been the secret India hiding in the top sectors— a mysterious and endlessly obfuscated caste system of wealthy families and old money. The general public is not supposed to realize how little in the American high sectors is idealistic and how much bought and sold— nor are we encouraged to note that, behind idealistic rhetoric, America was largely established to increase the profit margins of already-wealthy investors. Let me be candid: to some extent PFS can be bought and sold, because anything can. I will thusly perpetuate PFS in the most reasonable possible manner. But for myself, Jeremy Eric Tenenbaum, and the rest of PFS, buying and selling must be less essential (and exciting) than the processes of creativity itself. In other words, the art must come first.

In America, this is a revolutionary approach. The in-bred monotony of American art at high levels was always meant to be disrupted if anything or anyone more thoughtful, organic, and passionate showed— PFS is happy to provide the disruption. Jeremy was disruptive— he was impossible to miss in any room he entered. He spoke quickly, and urgently; approached social situations from twisted angles; and loved to be the center of attention. He exuded more raw vitality than any twenty American rich kids— and, like everyone in PFS, was a carnivorous participant in sex games and intrigues. PFS was a passionate context— and, no matter how far our work goes into the public domain and/or into certain canons, the passions which were ours must follow us around. Jeremy, being Jeremy, shot his passion through with artifice— but the wellspring of action and dynamic emotion was alive in him, and, being devilish and angelic at the same time, profit margins simply never seemed as important.

I wouldn't say this collection is a startling advance on the first "Hand in Glove"— it's a worthwhile and worthy continuation. My two favorites are the ones representing people, rather than "sites" or specific places— "Alien and Lovely" and "Red Room #4." Both have something to do with sin and salvation— interesting for an artist who was skeptical at best about organized or even disorganized religion outside the arts and expressed creativity. One ("Alien and Lovely") can be taken as a cry of joy, of being "saved," in a contradictory way, by passion and carnality; the other, a howl of agony from some purgatorial abyss. Jeremy, like many Cancers, was wont to cover things over— but he clearly had a soul, and knew it. That's why the Center City bar-circuit and all the malingering meshigas around PFS didn't break him, and he was able to continue creating on high levels. He was stronger than even I gave him credit for at the time— he was just circumspect about showing it. Even the self-pity of "Toiling in Obscurity" wasn't what it appeared to be— Jeremy was casting a shell over the pure artistic will-to-power of his best photographs of the late Aughts. He was protecting himself.

Adam Fieled, 2013



### ON “ALIEN AND LOVELY” BY JEREMY ERIC TENENBAUM

Intimacy is dangerous. One great casualty of the post-modern era is intimacy in works of higher art; especially intimacy like we see here, where the angles and composition suggest not only intimacy but “duende.” Moving beyond the rote quiddities of the innocence/experience binary, notice how the female subject seems not only to be seducing but orgasmically receiving the intrusion of the lens into her personal space. The miniature, rather dainty little cross she’s wearing (aligned in a pure vertical line with her face and head) makes explicit that the carnal for her has at least a touch of the godly in it; and a touch of sanctity

makes her aura more adorable. The evidence suggests that Jeremy took this picture in the South Jersey Philly suburbs where he was raised— for this South Jersey, inverse-Madonna to become an international carnality-signifier, all you have to do is look, and she knows that. She's Catholic, as was Jeremy's taste. South Jersey's form of transgression is working class, abrupt, and made raw by the hopelessly material (and materialistic) nature of Catholic spirituality. When this protagonist falls, she falls onto crosses; and the lowliness of her human flesh, in a contradictory way, deifies her beyond all belief.

It's not just that Jeremy's genius was to take a camera to bed; his "eye" is more made flesh than any in American history. Jeremy has translated South Jersey into France. Notice, however, that this Muse is no beauty queen; she's not precisely humble, either. She's willfully cute. Her flesh is accessible. Look how she appears, from the camera angle, to be in the midst of rolls and tumbles— you want her, and you've got her. From Marilyn to Britney, America is all about mannequin sexuality; this, however, is image made flesh.

Yet, as Jeremy was shrewd enough to notice, sex is strange, "alien." The you that's fucking, that tastes the sloppy bittersweet-ness of raw flesh, is another you; it's not the you that eats, shits, or creates. It's an essential you that nonetheless keeps slipping off into nothingness, and the congeries of all these elements stays sloppy. Perfect moments in this context are accidentally so; like our inverse-Madonna's cross and face. What's alien in intimacy can also be lovely, even in the muck of derelict/Frenchified South Jersey. Everything about this shot is a revelation of Otherness— including the unique sense of arrested motion which hits our guts with intimations of Lorca and European ambience being pierced and split in half. That's why this Muse is mischievous— as the camera doesn't know, it's capturing multiple and contradictory realities. The Muse's body is an embodied crossroads; and the action (crucially) is transpiring in the full light of day. Nothing is to be hidden.

The full revelation of alien loveliness has no alienation in it; all is smoothness and moisture. The smoothness and moisture are in the depths as well as the surface; and what erupts from the necessary friction is that genuine salvation is (or can be) skin, and is equally available in France or South Jersey, hidden or not by shadows or night. We are all rewarded because Jeremy poked a hole in America. Because America and American art prizes fame and despises anonymity, he pierces past this cultural folkway and creates a novel America, both fertile and anonymous, sublime and obscure. All he had to do was interrupt a make-out session and snap a few pictures— the fortuitous cross on which Old America is redly nailed, was probably not his idea. It didn't need to be— he received as he thrust too. A collusion of

miracles had to happen to take our Word and make it flesh— if you believe in miracles, art, or the interstices between them, like the wood-slatted bridge between France and South Jersey.

Adam Fieled, 2013



ON "RED ROOM #4" BY JEREMY ERIC TENENBAUM

Introspection is another issue which split PFS down the middle. Of the four main guys, Mike and I were the introspective ones. Jeremy loved to play the role of the tortured genius, but heavy soul-work, involving emotions, relationships, and his early family life, were not for him. He even discouraged his friends and acolytes from believing in the existence of the soul. That's one reason I laughed when I stumbled over "Red Room #4." Whether he realized it or not (he might've been channeling subconscious energy), Jeremy had painted a self-portrait of his soul in purgatory. The unnatural position of his head and neck, the unusual angle from which its shot and the heavy "paint it black" shading give him an extremely demonic appearance. It could even be his soul in hell, rather than purgatory. As has been mentioned elsewhere, Jeremy grew up in South Jersey surrounded by Catholics— his tactile hell was, I'm sure, partly internalized by osmosis. That's something I learned from the Free School years too— a sense of sin. Some of this was about carnality, even more of it was about gossip, and it added a sheen of final (and metaphysical) judgment to the dispersal of the square in '06-'07. Yet, for Jeremy and I, the judgment was providential— we were about to do our best work.

As of 2013, there are certainly reasons for some of us to repent— especially because, for many Free School participants (including Mr. Tenenbaum and Mr. Gruberg), whatever final judgment subsists for human souls has already been faced. Knowing Jeremy, however, there would have to be levels of irony and tongue-in-cheek in his own miniaturized Dantean vision. Unlike the PFS classicists (myself, Mary, and Abby), Jeremy wasn't completely repulsed by post-modern prankishness. Jeremy here explores his identity in the post-modern manner (maybe; as always, Jeremy teases the situation into potential contradiction)— is art inherently demonic, and is the artist a demon figure; or is the artist-as-demon a stale joke there to be resuscitated for cheap laughs and comfort food? By resolutely playing the middle in "Red Room #4," Jeremy again creates a dangerous context, for post-modernists and everybody else— safe only if you stay on the surface. However much he disdained introspection (and, from Mike and I, the psychobabble which went with it) in his life, art allowed Jeremy a vista where he could open up and create what he wanted from his insides, which were considerable, and devoid of the rich-kid pampered snobbishness which drained the life out of post-modernity from the Factory forward, and which we rebelled against.

One thing we never got from Jeremy was his life's story— he'd unearth fragments of his childhood here and there, but the master narrative of his early life was not one he cared to share. I never got over the hunch that the buried pain for him was overwhelming— I know, for example, that Jeremy's father was a phantom figure for him. I couldn't even determine if he

grew up lower middle-class or poor— that he went to Villanova and was never slovenly seemed to suggest lower middle-class. None of the four of us were obsessed with money— what Jeremy and I especially wanted was cultural capital. I came into a lump sum of cultural capital faster than he did, and he never forgave me for it— he obviously and blatantly felt banished to the hell of obscurity and toiling there. When Jeremy took this self-portrait, he had no way of knowing whether anyone would see it. By this time, I was publishing books and was also assured I could reach a reasonable audience whenever I wanted to (blogs helped, too). In retrospect, I admire Jeremy's gumption, and the possible acknowledgment (which was very much the truth) that he was asking for it, on a number of different levels. Part of his legacy must be the fear-of-no-legacy; and a reaction to this fear which bordered on the infernal.

Adam Fieled, 2013





### ON “LIGHTS #34” BY JEREMY ERIC TENENBAUM

Of the stable of PFS artists, Jeremy Eric Tenenbaum was the only one who found kitsch and Americana germane. This, “Lights #34,” is as close as Jeremy ever came to William Eggleston territory— and, like one of Eggleston’s major photos, it resonates with a quirky sense of harmony, oddity, and beauty salvaged. Talk about salvaging— it is worth discussing Jeremy’s own Flickr account, for a number of reasons. His Flickr account name is “typical genius,” which is just Jeremy being arch, or is it? Jeremy, as was his wont, does several confrontational

dances at once— he's to the left or right of meaning what he appears to be saying (that he's a typical genius), but also to the left or right of implying that any unique, autonomous genius could be "typical"; and he may or may not take for granted that "genius," in this day and age, is something that could accrue to any artist. But "typical genius" the account name is, and there are better than a thousand photos under that aegis.

The "Tenenbaum Thousand" are an epic, sprawling mess. The ones I've chosen to write about and disseminate are my favorites— but, because the others are bound to be discovered (and some of them skewered or celebrated) eventually, I thought I'd put in my two cents here. The big heroine/Muse of the T.T. is Jaime Fountaine, Jeremy's companion in putting together the "Toiling in Obscurity" reading series. To make a long-ish story short (about Muses, conventional good looks, odd good looks, who does or does not have camera magnetism, etc), I don't like her looks, and the several hundred shots involving Jaime are shots into the dust to/for me. Others might not agree; and, as the rest of the T.T. are discovered, we may hear their voices.

Another large chunk of the shots don't aspire to the conditions/rigors of art— shots of barbecues, fireworks on July 4<sup>th</sup>, etc. Jeremy was a Cancer, and had a fetish for documentation. Conversely, the "Rain Stained Awry" series are all nice and well-executed— I've chosen a few limbs to represent the whole body. There are more interesting shots of the doe-eyed Muse of "Two Girls..." and "Alien and Lovely," and the same rule applies. This South Jersey Muse and the landscape of Philadelphia itself were artistic good-luck charms for Mr. Tenenbaum. The shots, featuring Ms. Fountaine, taken at "Toiling in Obscurity" (that's another cool hundred) were clearly set in place to build esprit de corps and are a bore.

It also needs to be noted that much of Jeremy's best visual work didn't make it into the T.T.— particularly the fliers he put together for the Free School shows, which I should've kept but didn't. Jeremy also dumped (somewhere, I'm guessing) the hundred or so good shots he used for the First Friday gallery opening he curated (and I introduced) in Olde City in '06— particularly erotic shots of another decent Muse of his, Rosanna Lee (we called her "Rosie"). Graphic art in Philly in the Aughts was a big deal— it wasn't just Jeremy and PFS who produced inventive, artistic fliers. All the DJ series which ran from the Last Drop, like Making Time and Snacks, produced good graphic art to promote their events. Jeremy was the Mucha of the bunch; and his presence validated the whole endeavor of live art performance in Philly. Abs and Mary never descended to the level of graphic art, though Abs had the chance to do so with the Bad News Bats.

As the Aughts progressed, there was a gradual shift in Jeremy's ego energy— the visual began to take precedence over the written or spoken. He spent the decade earning money by drafting proposals and other things for the architect Robert Venturi, who was based on Main Street, Manayunk, and who I met in '05. Everything Jeremy did had a hinge to the arts. If he had a problem after PFS, it's because he wasn't particularly gifted at running his own shows— some of his tastes were exquisite, some tawdry. "Lights #34" is an interesting case in point, because it's both.



ON “MEMORIAL DAY #7” AND “UP 65” BY JEREMY ERIC TENENBAUM

There are very few American photographers of note who haven't attempted to bring urban American landscapes to life. Jeremy was certainly no exception. "Memorial Day #7" and "Up 65" are both bravura and very successful stabs in this direction. It's interesting to me how the painter's eye for coloration differs from the photographers'— how Abby, for example, invents where Jeremy preserves. You could take photography itself as a discipline as a potentially high-minded, Americanized answer to classicist Europe and its illustrious, solidly built history. Photography in some senses etherealizes what painting solidifies and concretizes. These two cityscape portraits of Jeremy's have a sheen of otherworldliness which chafes against the confines of their subject matter— the represented objects are bequeathed an auratic glow, a halo. Much of this has to do with freakish accidents of coloration— like the sky in "Memorial Day #7." It appears to be such a bold shade of purple, that the way its light comingles with light cast by the streetlights in the picture, it could be a Philip K. Dick vision of a future, post-apocalyptic world, or even a civilization's remnants on a foreign planet which loosely resembles planet Earth.

The pungent (half) realism of this world would be difficult to capture in paint— the ethereality of Abby's "Skaters" comes close. I don't even know precisely where this was shot— my educated guess would be Southwest Philly, perhaps on Bainbridge in the 20s. What's also interesting to me is that the eerie light effect Jeremy captures is (in a contradictory way) delicious and enticing; it makes the receptive viewer want to be there on Bainbridge Street pre-dawn and walk on the extraterrestrial terrain. Most American photographers blow their chances to make American cities interesting by playing the game too straight— Jeremy, of course, was incapable of playing any game too straight. He was too fiercely proud of his queerness to do so. The visual subtext of "Memorial Day #7" is odd delectability and glamour; what "Up 65" does with New Jersey's Tacony-Palmyra Bridge has more to do with a profound sense of ruefulness and "the blues," which make the portrait much less about surfaces and more about depths. We are clued in through visual depths that the picture is being taken from inside a moving vehicle which is about to cross the bridge; and the "double" here has to do with bridges crossed and connections made which nonetheless have gloominess built into them somewhere— perhaps through tragic flaws revealing themselves or irreconcilable differences appearing in insurmountable forms.

The poetry, as they say, is in the pity— how the overwhelming and merciless grey sky dwarfs our little human constructs, whether they be bridges or attempts to represent the same (second bridges derived from the first). Further interest is added by an implicit narrative—

since the shot was snapped from inside a moving vehicle, one wonders what the protagonist's relationship to the driver is, and if the metaphoric arrow lands there. Whether or not it does, the narrative gap which opens is wide enough for innumerable answers to fill it. That's the hinge "Up 65" has to the infinite. Since it begins from the American egalitarianism of capturing a vista which was already there to begin with, the classicist bent of PFS is balanced by Jeremy's anti-classicism, which borrows enough depth and multi-dimensionality from standard and standardized classicism to measure about to world standards. The crossroads site for this conglomeration of sensibilities is Philadelphia and its environs— the secret Paris of the East Coast, bluffing and dodging like the Gemini it is, ready to be seen and revealed by the right eyes at the right time, and passed along to those interested.



ON "RAIN STAINED AWRY #s 8 & 43" BY JEREMY ERIC TENENBAUM

Beauty in decay is a theme I've always been attracted to. Jeremy Eric Tenenbaum was, too. Beauty in decay is one of the glories of Philadelphia in general, from the mansions of West Philly to how Broad Street looks as it passes through North Philly into the 'burbs. I've always had a special predilection for the Divine Lorraine hotel, where, as my Dad told me when I was young, you used to be able to get decent cafeteria meals on the cheap. Decay is the inverse side of another one of Jeremy's key facets— a love (skirting lechery and decadence) for youth and beauty, the charm and glamour of them together. The "Rain Stained Awry" series can be taken a number of different ways— the interpretive vista of beautiful decay could just as easily be construed as a critique of urban space, or even the fall of urban America into Recession and entropy. I like beautiful decay best, because that gloss seems most simpatico with the Jeremy I remember— an artist who, like me and against the post-modern grain, cared deeply about beauty and ways and means of salvaging beauty from the contexts life presented us with, against or with our will.

"8" is especially beautiful to me for its peculiar composition and ambience of abject desolation. The process towards a shot like "8" having particular significance for us speeded up after '06-'07— both because the social structures which had supported us had eroded into a shambles, and because our shambles mirrored the national and international scene. To the extent that a work of photographic art can haunt, "8" is haunting. Its forms are misshapen and obscurely pleasing at the same time— and Jeremy again finds a novel angle to play. I want to say "8" is a representatively American image, but I can't— festoons like these are used all over the world, and that the forms together express a certain depth involves "8" in Europe and a profound past. In numerology, "8" is the number of Saturn, and there is something saturnine about the shot— it is more sober and hushed than was Jeremy's wont. It signifies, with great visual truthfulness and candor, a party about to end.

"43" looks like it was taken in Upper Darby, a section of North Philadelphia notorious for its gnarled appearance. The figure under the overpass provides a center for the composition, but the focus of the shot is the street open-faced itself on a rainy day, decay overlaid on decay (to paraphrase an image from the I-Ching). The shot does one of Jeremy's inversion tricks— it makes Upper Darby look delicious, enticing, and glamorous by setting lineation (horizontals and verticals) in harmonious motion around the hooded figure who occupies center stage. Harmonious motion is another agent to place against erosion in dynamic relation— erosion, which implies stasis, balanced and mastered. There is more than a little Tao in Jeremy's methods— forces he channels allow him to represent natural polarities in the process of balancing and completing each other. It all happens in the context of clouds and cloudiness— the sky's decay into being clotted.

These two shots represent the imposition of harmony from sheer force of will onto unpromising materials. Is the best art a manifestation of sheer willfulness? Jeremy, like myself and the rest of PFS, was willful but thoughtful about his willfulness, in a way American artists haven't been before. Post-modernity amounted to the imposition of willful mindlessness, through which it knowingly guaranteed its own obsolescence. Thoughtless art generally doesn't last; nor do thoughtless cultures. To make fair-grounds from waste lands, first in thought, then in form— that was one major PFS trick. No one among us did this trick with more panache than Jeremy Eric Tenenbaum.

